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AN ORATION,

Cambridge

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DELIVERED BEFORE THE

SOCIETY OF THE ALUMNI,

OF THE

UNIVERSITY OF ALABAMA,

AT ITS FOURTH ANNIVERSARY.

DECEMBER 10th, 1839.

BY WALTER H. CRENSHAW, A. M.

TUSCALOOSA :

Baldwin :::::1839,

UNIVERSITY OF ALABAMA, }
December 10th, 1839. }

W. H. Crenshaw, Esq. :

DEAR SIR. The Society of the Alumni of the University of Alabama have delegated us, as a committee on behalf of that body to convey to you a sense of the high satisfaction which your very appropriate and eloquent Oration of to-day afforded them ; and earnestly to request of you a copy of the same for publication : And be assured, sir, that your compliance with the request of the Society will be received with unfeigned satisfaction by them, and with much interest by the well-wishers of Literature throughout the State.

Very sincerely, your friends,

RICHARD H. RICKS,
THOS. M. PETERS,
W. A. COCHRAN.

} Committee.

TUSCALOOSA, }
Dec. 12th, 1839. }

Gentlemen:

Your note of the 10th instant, requesting a copy of my address for publication, is now before me. In reply, permit me to say, that I feel a deep sense of gratitude for the flattering manner in which you have noticed the same.

Aware, as I am, of its many imperfections, I would be induced to withhold it from the public eye, were it not for a sincere desire to contribute my mite to promote the objects of the society for which it was written. Tender to your Society my thanks for the honor which it has conferred on me, and give it my pledge of an earnest solicitude for its welfare and prosperity. Accept for yourselves, gentlemen, my lasting friendship and best respects,

WALTER H. CRENSHAW.

Messrs. RICHARD H. RICKS,
THOS. M. PETERS,
WM. A. COCHRAN,

} Committee.

T. R.
1910

ORATION.

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RESPECTED ASSEMBLY :

THE object of this meeting is to celebrate the fourth Anniversary of the Society of the Alumni, of the University of Alabama—A society instituted “to retain and perpetuate the associations of College life ; to increase and preserve unity and fellowship of feeling ; to promote the prosperity of our Alma Mater ; and to advance at large the cause of learning and morality.” Such in the language of its constitution are its noble purposes. Then, though the kind partiality of friends has placed the responsible duty of officiating on the present occasion upon one so incapable of acquitting himself with credit, yet an enlightened auditory like this will cheerfully give a polite attention to the remarks which will be offered, and attribute the want of interest in the discourse to the proper cause.

FELLOW ALUMNI : The revolution of another year has convened us at the temple of literature and science. To be permitted to participate in “the feast of reason and the flow of soul” must to an intelligent mind afford exquisite pleasure : but *to us*, this is a moment of still greater interest. We are not only sacrificing at the shrine of learning ; but it is within those consecrated walls, where we were accustomed to bring our rude offerings in boyhood’s days, that we are now assembled. This is the rostrum, on which we delighted to display in beautiful pictures of the imagination the harmonious melody of poesy, the charms of literature, and the profound laws of science and philosophy. What then must be our feelings ! Is there one with a recollection so dull that he cannot sketch from “memory’s tablet” the pleasing recollections of College life ? With the rapidity of thought the thrilling incidents rise to view ; and as if by a magic wand the interval of time is stricken from being.

We now revisit those delightful groves in the journey of life, where a few years since we were winding our way, and culling the rich

fruit which hung in clusters on every hand. To the eye of maturity new beauties appear, far brighter than those seen in our tenderer years. We are again in the midst of the scenes of our literary strife. Here the "midnight taper" was burned to unravel the mysteries of science, and acquire the beauties of classic elegance. Here in the noble race we ventured to climb the "steep on which fame's proud temple shines afar." Nor is this all : when the mind was at rest, the burning ardour of youth animated by sport would cause the plain to ring with sounds of mirth and glee—Youth and beauty too would often meet, and hold "sweet converse" until

"Soft eyes look'd love to eyes which spake again."

These are some of the more pleasing recollections of College life, which are now rapidly passing in review before us. Then have we a dearer day than this ? To perpetuate these associations accounts in part for the organization of this Society; and its anniversary will ever be greeted as a welcome messenger of glad tidings, for with its return these feelings will be enjoyed anew. Hence we have met to day.

But you are not all present. Time in his swift chariot has rolled on ; and the chilly dampness of death has consigned some of our number to the silent tomb.—Yes, departed ones, you had just launched your vessels on the broad ocean of life's busy world. As a reward for your toil-earned laurels, golden prospects of the future were spread before you. With hearts that knew no sorrow, you bade adieu to these walls, which have often resounded with your eloquent strains ; you parted from your fellows as a lover parts from the fair idol of his affections ; little thinking you were leaving forever a place to which you were bound by a thousand ties, and that you were looking for the last time on earth at the well known features then surrounding you. You had scarce lost sight of the pleasing prospect from which you were rapidly flying, and were bending your anxious thoughts on the end of your distant journey, when suddenly a gathering storm burst above your heads. Thus, when you least thought the distant future had arrived, your frail barks of life were shattered to atoms, and the goal of your existence at hand. You have left us : but still in memory you are with us ; and as often as this anniversary returns, a tribute of respect will be paid you by those of us who still remain.

Others too are absent ; but they are gently moving down the

stream of time, reaping the harvest of the seed sown and cultivated with so much care at this their Alma Mater. And we alone of the small band have assembled to feast upon the past, and trace upon historic page the progress of intellect and reason.

Fellow Alumni : You have tasted of the sweets of literature, and know how to appreciate the valuable treasure. You have talents ; for the diligent use of which you are responsible. This is a subject of vast importance : and upon no theme could I detain you, that would be more appropriate to the present occasion than that of the responsibility of American youth. We are a people peculiarly blessed. Cast your eye over the broad surface of our land ; and you see every thing to make happy this favoured nation. Extending as it does from the snow-capt mountains of Maine on the North to the sunny plains of Florida and Louisiana on the South, it embraces every variety of climate, soil, and productions. We see majestic streams winding through its deep and fertile valleys, and wafting wealth and luxury into the bosom of commerce. Where nature failed to contribute, art has supplied the deficiency ; and the puffing cars are rattling over hill and dale, freighted with the rich produce of the inner land, and facilitating the means of conveyance between places hitherto scarcely accessible. The forest is fast falling before the inroads of civilization ; temples of learning and morality are daily springing into existence ; and literature and science are rapidly spreading over the land. Whimsical man can here find whatever his fastidious wants may demand. He can enjoy the most salubrious climes in every variety of situation—on the mountains of Vermont, the coasts of Carolina, and the plains of Alabama. Does a pleasing prospect give delight ? Then climb to the summit of some lofty peak, and look down upon the plain below : see the proud growth of the forest gently waving in the breeze, and imperceptibly raising their towering heads above each other, till in the distance a dim line closes the view : or follow the meanderings of the Ohio, the Mississippi, the Hudson, or of our own Alabama and Warrior. In what country of antiquity will you find grander scenery ? Perhaps you desire to visit the smooth and mirror-like surface of some tranquil lake, and gaze with rapture on its enchanted imagery. If so, America can boast of as splendid, either for size or beauty, as those of romantic Scotland or Switzerland. Nor can Italia's self present a more beautiful sky, or a purer atmosphere than our own sunny South. Witness

on a summer eve, when the sky is unspotted with a cloud, the departing rays of the sun in the western horizon ; and see the beautiful gold tinge spread upon the azure vault. How magnificent the scene ! Can the boasted splendour of other climes excel this picture ? This fair domain then stands unrivalled in wealth, in resources, in beauty of scenery, and in native grandeur. Every thing that can please is here developed. What a field for talent !

But that which is dearer still, remains to be told : this is a land of freedom, where enlightened man dwells, unrestrained and unfettered by the minions of power. Go back with me to those days that “ tried men’s souls,” when our ancestors nobly fought to free themselves and their country from the tyrant’s grasp. With “ heroic fortitude ” they rushed to the combat, though to meet a countless foe. Without arms, without clothing, without every thing needful for soldiers, almost in a state of starvation they resisted a proud and powerful enemy. Nor did they fight in vain : by their well-timed patriotism they have snatched a terrestrial paradise from political thralldom, and opened a door of “ refuge for the oppressed, and an asylum for the poor.” We inherit the rich legacy ; and as faithful sons it is our duty to preserve it in its native purity.

In this favoured land the government, the climate, nay every thing tends to the developement of the intellectual powers. Here are the materials for acquiring an unbounded celebrity in the arts and sciences. With all these advantages can we act so unworthily as not to improve those talents placed under our care ? Can we be so unmindful of our duty as to permit this fair fabric to vanish into air ? As American citizens it is a duty we owe our country to use our best endeavours to promote its prosperity and happiness, physically and mentally. But you are ready to exclaim with me, that an Alumnus of this University will spare no pains to elevate and maintain the character of his country. Then why shall we be dilatory in the march of mind ? Why shall we look longer to England or the Continent for information in letters ? Is America not yet old enough to depend upon her own resources ? Sixty odd years ago she proved herself able to cope with the physical force of the self-styled mistress of the world : now let her exert the same independence of mind, and soon will the glory of the East be eclipsed by the dazzling lights shining in the West. Let us then show that America has brilliant talents ;

and that she will no longer tamely succumb, and be dictated to by the subjects of foreign despots. Do you doubt our ability? Let me point you to fame's proud eminence, where is inscribed in lasting letters the names of a Washington, a Dwight, a Jefferson, a Marshall, and a host of others, showing that already have we made noble strides in the grand march of improvement. See what wonders industry and perseverance in Franklin accomplished : your opportunities are greater than his ; then let as profitable account be given of your exertions, and the day of our literary enfranchisement will soon be with us.

Much has been done for the advancement of science ; but much remains unfinished. Do you want incentive to action ? Unfurl the records of the past, and compare the dark ages with the present enlightened state of mind. Then an impenetrable veil of darkness mantled over the world, and blunted for a time the intellect of man. Sunk to a level with the brute, he ceased to feel pleasure in knowledge ; but delighted in gratifying his vicious propensities at the expense of his fellows. " War, pestilence, and famine" sweep over the land like the dreadful simoom of the desert, consuming the accumulated wisdom of ages, the relics of antiquity. Once more society is thrown into chaos : all is confusion and anarchy : an uninterrupted scene of warfare floods the land with blood. Dismal scenes of misery and woe accumulate upon each other, until humanity shudders at the shocking recital. To what history will you point whose pages are not covered with the bloody progress of some mighty chieftain accompanied with all the horrors of war. His contracted mind conceives of no lofty ideas ; he performs no useful deeds to transmit his memory ; but he glories alone in exterminating his race. No sublime notions of a Deity, no pleasing images of a future world enter his beclouded brain. In the sun and moon he fancies to himself a divine creator ; his fruitful superstition has created a thousand hideous forms, before which he bows in humble devotion, scarce worthy of a smile of contempt in this enlightened day. After remaining for centuries in this unhallowed darkness, the intellect broke through the spell ; and like the phenix rising from its ashes it appears with new lustre.

The sixteenth century will ever be noted as a memorable era in the history of man. Then as if invigorated by its long slumber the mind awoke, refreshed and prepared for a new and more brilliant sphere of action. The hermits' cells, which for a thou-

sand years had secreted from the world, and preserved from destruction the learned fragments of the ancients, are opened to view ; and the hidden treasure is seized with rapturous delight. An impetus was now given ; science dawns ; art is added to art ; improvements rise upon improvement ; and every day gives birth to some new mental phenomena. The wonderful works of nature are displayed with awful sublimity and grandeur. Superstition leaves its long abode, and true religion occupies its place. Despotism loses its strong holds, and yields to the enlightening influence of literature. What before appeared mysterious is now viewed with pleasure. Chemistry, Geology, Astronomy, and other hitherto hidden sciences are now thoroughly investigated. Elevated by these powerful leavers man grasps the systems of the universe—the theories of mind and matter. He analyzes vegetables and minerals ; and shows that the world is composed of a few primary substances, differently combined to produce the variegated appearance. Not only this : he flies into space ; calculates the respective distances and dimensions of the sun, moon, and planets ; and proves by incontestable evidence that they are masses of matter revolving in space.

The march of mind has continued onward, until in the ebullition of its zeal its presence is seen and felt in the Western world. And now near a hundred proud beacons of science point the way to eminence, where a few years since terror and darkness reigned. If perchance a spirit of the fourteenth century were to revisit this sublunary world, with what amazement he would view the radiant splendour that now lightens the scene. So great the change, so different the pursuits & occupations of man, that he would scarce believe the evidence of his senses ; and would sooner imagine himself on some fairy land, of which he had often heard marvellous tales, than amid the scenes of his nativity. In vain would he look for those monuments of glory which he imagined were as lasting as time : long since has every vestige to tell of him ceased to exist. The powerful efforts of truth and reason have prevailed ; and every thing exhibits a new appearance. Who that has drank at the fount of learning, is not pleased with the wonderful change ; and does not rejoice in being a citizen of the nineteenth century ?

As members of society it is our duty to preserve untarnished the present refined state of literature ; but as Alumni of this University we have something more, we have a lasting debt of gratitude to pay. Here we received all the advantages of a liberal ed-

ucation ; and here our youthful minds imbibed their first impressions, and learned to appreciate the rich stores of knowledge around them. Then if there be any sense of pride or honor remaining, how eagers should we be to promote the prosperity of this our Alma Mater! I need only remind you of your duty ; and the boiling blood of patriotism in your veins will cause you with alacrity to perform well your part.

Trace the history of this infant State ; and its rapid progress will fill with amazement the most skeptical mind. Twenty-five years since, and Alabama was a howling wilderness, where roved the red man of the woods, the undisturbed occupant of the fair domain. From morn till night, from day to day, the chase was his favorite and all absorbing occupation. A child of nature, his wants were few; and happiness smiled upon him. The intricate mysteries of science were to him unknown ; his mind had slept in oblivion until mental darkness was a portion of his nature. He leaves no record of the past to tell of the origin of his race ; but he lives and dies, and like the vilest reptile nothing remains. Then he and the white man were strangers ; since that short period the tide of civilization has swept over the land; and now scarce a remnant remains to tell of his existence. Instead of his hunting grounds extensive fields present themselves to view : where stood his rude wigwam, and where smoked his council fires, now appear the stately mansions and magnificent cities with their towering steeples, so suddenly erected as to seem created by enchantment. A noble and gallant race has rapidly passed from among us :

“But their memory liveth on your hills,
 Their baptism on your shore,
 Your everlasting rivers speak
 Their dialect of yore. ”

To the *devotee* of letters this change is a source of pleasure ; but to *us* it is something more, for it is our natal land—the land of the South, that is now receiving the cheering light. Already has our young and gallant State, though scarce weaned from its infancy, exhibited a noble spirit of improvement. A few years more, and her manly efforts in the march of mind will place her in the front of the bright galaxy of sister States. Then the golden age of Southern literature will have arrived, when ignorance with its host of evils will be banished from the world. Then you will be pointed to as bright examples for the rising youth to im-

state; and it will be said of you with pride, there goes an Alumnus of the University of Alabama. How pleasing the reflection that you will have contributed to the promotion of the glorious cause! You will then lie down in peace with an approving conscience testifying that you have discharged your duty. Nor will this be your only meed: your deeds will be transmitted to posterity, recorded on "monuments more lasting than brass." Can you refer me to a greater incentive to action than this? Is knowledge power? then all should attain it. Is it pleasure? then none should be debarred. Is it a guardian of liberty? then every freeman should possess and cherish it.

Alabama, though of only twenty years growth, shows the presence of civilized society, and the diffusion of useful knowledge. But she has scarcely entered upon her noble course. Take a geographical survey of the States: which one surpasses her in natural resources? It may with propriety be called the garden spot of America. What then shall prevent the elevation of her mental character? Nothing is wanting but energy on the part of her sons. Do you ask for a head from which science shall emanate? Where is the University of Alabama? Why should not as pure a stream flow from these walls as from those of Harvard or Yale? Of all the seminaries of learning now in the U. States, Harvard alone surpasses its endowments. With an extensive library; with excellent philosophical and chemical apparatus; with a faculty, which I am proud to say, will vie with those of older institutions; and with splendid edifices situated on a delightful plain in a healthy region, it is compelled to attract the rising generation not only of our own, but of our sister States. It is true they have the accumulated light of ages; but we have the means of acquiring the same without waiting for centuries to roll over us. An institution, established with the funds of this, has all the intrinsic advantages of age; for by our resources we can command the best of talent. Then having the wealth among us, why shall we not open the valuable mines? I would not have you draw geographical lines, and forbear to mingle with this or that people; for we are all members of the same great family, and are bound in the bonds of fraternal love. Our sister states have exerted their powers, and displayed to an admiring world their unrivalled talents: we envy them not their fame; but as brothers we imitate their worthy example, and endeavour to surpass their glory. This then is the bright source from which our

light is to come. Will you ask another to perform that which yourself can do? Then why look abroad for instruction? Is it a part of our state pride to desert her, when she most needs our assistance? Shall we tell our sisters that we are incompetent, and must look to them for the diffusion of knowledge? No: rather let us convince them that they have scarce removed the rubbish, and that to us falls the lot to polish the bright jewels which have so long mouldered in ruins.

Citizens of Alabama: You are deserting the best interests of your state, when you refuse to receive instruction at her hand. You have erected within your borders a splendid temple of science; it is your duty to patronize and encourage it by your deeds. Your interests are centered here; then let your sons here imbibe the pleasing draught of science, and their early associations will be intimately blended with the vital interests of your State. They will delight to do honor to a State from which they have received the earliest impressions of their duty. With what mistaken motives, and how unworthy of yourselves you act, when you turn from your own, and give the fostering care of your sons to the institutions of distant states! You do this; because fame perchance has rumored that those are the colossal statues of science, where the mind bursts into gigantic proportions, and that at your infant seminary only a slight and superficial knowledge can be obtained. Let me ask upon what *facts* you base your conclusions: have you examined for yourselves; do you not know that rumor and truth are as different as darkness from the noon day sun? Perchance "distance lends enchantment to your view": remember that like the glaring torch as we approach near they dwindle to their proper size. Perhaps false prejudice or pride impels you to your course: then you are not acting the part of a patriot, and should at once correct the evil. Can you expect your literary institutions to acquire fame, if you do not give them an opportunity to display their abilities? Need I preach a homily on the necessities and advantages of education? Fortunately we have passed that period. Wherever you turn, you see written in legible characters its innumerable blessings. The only enquiry with you is, where can this knowledge be best obtained. Do not say that I am sectional, when I reply at the University of Alabama. Do we go abroad to supply ourselves with the various necessities of life, with which we already abound? Then having the means, shall we not acquire our literary attainments in the

same way? To be remembered a people must have action; they must apply themselves with zeal to acquire information, otherwise they scarce occupy a place on the pages of history. How meanly would Alabama act her part, if with her advantages she should refuse to awake her energies, and assume that elevated station to which her mental abilities entitle her. Too long already have we been dependent on others.

Let a literary stranger enter our land; and where does he find the arts and sciences in the most refined state of cultivation? Is it at the South? No: he sees but a glimmering light having rather the appearance of the sixteenth century than of the present enlightened day. With amazement too he views the scene, for at the same time he beholds a country abounding in wealth, and every way adapted to the expansion of the intellect. Often do you hear it asked, why does Southern literature not rise above mediocrity! Let me tell you why: it is because the South is not aroused to a sense of her duty; she knows not the extent of her abilities; and her citizens instead of educating their children make the accumulation of wealth their sole object, forgetting that by one stroke of misfortune the exertions of years may be swept away, and themselves left destitute. So long as the education of the youth of our land remains a secondary object, will the South occupy an obscure station in the march of improvement.

Fellow Alumni: It is a duty devolving on us as members of this society to create "a change over the spirit of our dream." Are you willing to see Alabama follow ingloriously where she should lead? At once cast off the slur thrown upon our character, and show to an amazed world that our resources in intellect are as unbounded as in wealth. To you, and to you alone must we look for the desired change. Located in the various sections of the State you have the power to enlighten your countrymen. Proclaim to them the many advantages of education; arouse them from their lethargy, and teach them their true interest. Ignorance and superstition will yield to the arguments of reason. Then let it be the special duty of each one of you to see that your own vicinity is advancing in science; give your voice and your pen to the advancement of the cause. By thus exerting your talents and influence, you can in a few years revolutionize the mental character of your State. But already the noble strife has begun: our lawgivers have taken in charge the important subject. At

the last session of our Legislature an annual appropriation of one hundred and fifty thousand dollars was made for the benefit of schools. Let our succeeding legislatures continue to follow this patriotic example, until the means of a liberal education are placed in the reach of every child in the State; and in a few short years they will view with pleasure the rich fruits of their legislation. They will then discover that in appropriations like this they have consulted the welfare of their State. Then will have arrived the golden age of literature; and Alabama will boast of her philosophers, statesmen, and poets, who will fill the highest niche of fame's proud temple.

They will point to these venerable walls as the fountain from whence they extracted their fame; and they will hail you as *Fellow Alumni*. Then will Southern literature eclipse the glory of its now sneering superiors, and lighten them on to exalted eminence. Reviews, periodicals, works of science and morality will spring from the fertile genius of our Alma Mater, until ignorance is banished from every corner; and not a family will remain in darkness. What an incentive to action is this! Does not the bare recital arouse your feelings, and cause you to feel powers of mind until now latent and unknown? Your state pride will redouble your exertions to acquire for it a transcendent reputation. I shall not urge you to your pleasing duty; your enlightened minds are ready to promote the prosperity of your country. You are aware of the proud destiny awaiting your State, and are animated with a chivalrous spirit to hasten it on. Go on in your manly course; you cannot serve your country in a better cause. The time is not far distant when you will reap the harvest of your labors, and be greeted as benefactors of mankind. Then to be an Alumnus of this University will be a distinguished mark of honor, dearer to the wearer than the magnificent splendour of a regal diadem.

With these remarks I leave you: but wherever my lot may be cast, or what the length of my days, I shall ever have an abiding interest in the prosperity of our Alma Mater; and will look forward with pleasing anticipation to the arrival of that day, when the trump of fame shall award it the wreath of glory. Yes,

"Come bright improvement! on the car of Time,
And rule the spacious world from clime to clime;
Thy handmaid arts shall every wild explore,
Trace every wave, and culture every shore."





